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SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES: CHILD LABOR UPDATE 2006

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[1](#)1. Summary and Introduction: This message provides input requested for the Secretary of Labor's annual report to Congress on the implementation of commitments to eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor (ref a). It updates information provided by Post in 2005 (ref b) regarding child labor laws and regulations in the Philippines, law enforcement capabilities, social programs aimed at prevention, statistics on child labor and child education, and government policies and programs to combat child labor.

[1](#)2. Despite GRP efforts to combat child labor, it remains a serious problem. Republic Act 9231 (RA 9231), signed by President Arroyo in 2003, has strengthened the existing anti-child labor code. Criminal prosecutions and convictions, however, remain rare. The International Labor Organization (ILO) and NGOs such as World Vision and Winrock International have made progress in identifying children engaged in or at-risk for the worst forms of child labor and mainstreaming them into the educational process. According to officials of the ILO-managed Philippine Time-Bound Program (PTBP), funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, it has helped more than 38,000 children by preventing them from engaging in child labor or reducing the time that they spend in dangerous activities.

[1](#)3. Sources of information used during the preparation of this update include the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), including DOL's Bureau of Women and Young Workers, the International Labor Organization, World Vision, and Winrock International. End Summary and Introduction.

Background

[1](#)4. Estimates of the incidence of child labor in the Philippines vary significantly. The 2000/2001 National Survey on Children (NSC) estimated that as many as four million children aged 5 to 17 years were economically active -- 16.2 percent of the total population of children in that age group. Of the four million child workers, an estimated 60 percent, or 2.4 million, were exposed to hazardous working environments. The Labor Force Survey (conducted and published by the National Statistics Office) for January 2005 revealed that about 2.13 million, or 8.4 percent, of the total 25.31 million children 5 to 7 years old, are engaged in economic activities. The number is similar to last year's (January 2004) figure of 2.14 million. (Note: The Labor Force Survey cited a lower number of working children since it

relied on "the past seven days" as the reference period in the survey, compared to the national survey, which used "the past year" as the reference period. End Note.)

15. The Philippine government spends approximately three percent of its GDP on education. Government support for the education of poor children is provided indirectly through the public school system rather than through targeted subsidies. The public school enrollment rate for 2005-06 was 74 percent, slightly down from 76 percent for the 2004-2005 school year.

16. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed Republic Act 9231 ("Providing for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor and Affording Strong Protection for the Working Child") in 2003, codifying regulations set forth in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Convention 182.

The law, which gave more muscle to the existing anti-child labor code, has not yet resulted in any convictions (see para 14). Among the industries employing the worst forms of child labor are sugarcane plantations, pyrotechnics production, deep-sea fishing, mining and quarrying, domestic service, and the commercial sex industry. The Labor Code of 1993 and Republic Act 7658 also of 1993 similarly prohibit the employment of children under the age of 15, except when working directly with a parent and when the work does not endanger the child's life, safety, health, or morals, or interfere with schooling. The laws require that any child under age 15 employed under these guidelines must receive a special permit from the DOLE, but do not define the absolute minimum age for employment by children.

New and Continuing Initiatives

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17. The U.S. Department of Labor funds several initiatives through the ILO, World Vision, and Winrock International to combat child labor in the Philippines. The key programs are:

-- ILO-IPEC implementation of Philippine Time-Bound Program (PTBP): This program began in 2002 to support the Philippine government's goal of reducing the Worst Forms of Child Labor (WFCL) by 75 percent by 2015. The project covers eight provinces. The goal is to rescue 44,500 children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in or at-risk for WFCL by 2007 through counseling, education, and reintegration with their families (Note: The implementation of ILO-IPEC PTBP was extended to August 2007. End Note);

-- Combating Child Soldiers: ILO-IPEC is implementing this program to reduce the incidence of child soldiers in Mindanao. ILO-IPEC estimates that at least 2,000 children or minors may be child soldiers in the Philippines. By November 2006, the project had withdrawn and/or prevented 302 children from armed conflict and reintegrated them into mainstream society. 120 of these minors were enrolled in elementary grades, high school, or college, while 182 were given vocational skills training. During the year, ILO conducted public awareness campaigns against the involvement of children in armed conflict through 22 radio stations in Mindanao;

-- The Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) Program: The TREE program provides skills training to create economic opportunities in Mindanao. One of the target groups for this initiative is 14-18 year old youth. By September 2006, a total of 1,210 beneficiaries had completed community-based training in vocational skills, such as welding, tailoring, food processing, pottery making, and dressmaking. About 340 more trainees are expected to complete the training by March 2007;

-- The ABK Education Initiative: Under this program (the education component of the PTBP), World Vision, along with a

number of NGO partners, provides transitional or vocational education programs for working children as well as those identified to be "at-risk." Since the project was implemented in 2003, 31,098 children have been enrolled in formal or informal education. In May 2006, World Vision and its partner NGOs gathered more than 100 media practitioners in a National Media Summit on Child Labor to help raise awareness about child labor;

-- Increasing Public Awareness and Capacities of National and Local Alliances through Program and Policy Advocacies Towards Realization of Time Bound Education Agenda: ILO-IPEC launched this program in May 2005 as part of the regional project "APEC Awareness-Raising Campaign: Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labor and Providing Educational Opportunities." The project aims to engage key stakeholders through national alliances in the development of education materials, and conduct awareness-raising activities as well as policy advocacy for education;

-- The CIRCLE project: On its second phase of implementation in 27 countries including the Philippines, the Community-based Innovations to Combat Child Labor through Education (CIRCLE) project funded five local organizations to conduct innovative and community-based education programs in areas of high incidence of child labor. As of August 2006, 986 children have been withdrawn and/or prevented from child labor and enrolled instead in formal and informal education.

18. DOLE is also implementing a project, funded by the Geneva-based Elimination of Child Labor in Tobacco Foundation, to reduce the incidence of child labor in tobacco fields in the Ilocos region. As of March 2006, the project has given two-year scholarship grants to 100 children, as well as alternative livelihood assistance and basic entrepreneurial training to their families. The project also conducted awareness-raising activities for about 2,000 participants in five municipalities.

PTBP Projects: Results

19. Significant PTBP achievements through November 2006 are:

-- Child labor monitoring was included in the technical advisory visits and self-assessment training manuals of

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DOLE's Labor Standard Enforcement Framework. Child labor indicators were also included in the Department of Education's basic education monitoring and evaluation framework;

-- According to the PTBP, 38,653 children were withdrawn and/or prevented from engaging in the six priority WFCL sectors. ILO-IPEC, through its partner organizations, provided them with psychological counseling, temporary shelter (and eventual referral to the Department of Social Welfare and Development -- DSWD) and basic health services, repatriation assistance, vocational training, alternative education, and/or help in preparing for formal schooling. About 1,300 adult family members of these children received livelihood support and assistance such as access to micro-credit, provision of basic literacy and vocational training, and assistance in starting micro enterprises;

-- In collaboration with the Visayan Forum Foundation (VFF), PTBP launched in May 2004 an action program to target 3,000 children in the domestic labor pool and mainstream them into formal or non-formal education. By June 2006, the VFF had rescued 2,335 children from domestic work; of these, 545 were enrolled in formal education, 379 were enrolled in alternative education and vocational training, and 1,417 were provided psychological, medical, and/or legal counseling services. According to VFF, the organization also prevented

more than 1,400 at-risk children from entering the domestic labor market.

Government Action

¶10. DOLE participated in a number of programs and activities to mark the 2006 World Day Against Child Labor (WDACL) on June 12, including:

-- Seminar on the Global Report on Child Labor conducted by ILO;

-- Symposium on the operation of local government units on the protection of children, organized by the International Textiles, Garments, and Leather Workers Federation;

-- Dental and medical mission for child laborers and their families in Bulacan, Central Luzon.

¶11. DOLE launched on December 4 "Program Angel Tree," which highlights DOLE's commitment to eliminate child labor and alleviate the plight of child workers and their families. The program contains a broad array of social services, such as provision of food, clothing, shelter, mentoring, livelihood assistance, educational assistance, and other work and training opportunities for child workers and their families. Resources for this program come from private donations and available government services.

¶12. The National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) serves as the interagency steering committee for the GRP's National Policy of Action on Child Labor (NPACL) framework. The NCLC, with DOLE as the lead agency, is currently working on a new NPACL Framework for 2007-2015 and the Strategic Plans 2007-2010 to eliminate child labor. A national summit on child labor likely will take place in June 2007 to present the new framework and strategic plans. The NCLC, in partnership with the ILO, held a "National Forum on Child Labor and Mining in the Philippines" to mark the 2005 WDACL. Relevant government agencies, workers' organizations, employers' groups, and the social partners of NPACL participated in the forum, which presented the findings of a study on children in mining in Camarines Norte and the actions taken by NGOs and local government agencies to address the problem of child labor. DOLE, the Trade Union Congress, the Federation of Free Workers, and the Employers Confederation of the Philippines endorsed the ILO call to eliminate child labor in the mining and quarrying industries by 2015.

¶13. DOLE leads the interagency "Sagip Batang Manggagawa" (Rescue the Child Workers, or SBM) program, which rescued 1,562 child labor victims between 2001 and 2006. From January to September 2006, SBM conducted 44 rescue operations involving 201 child workers. The rescued minors were referred to the DSWD for rehabilitation and reintegration.

¶14. Thus far in 2006, DOLE has ordered the closure of three establishments, allegedly engaged in prostitution of minors,

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for violating RA 9231 (see below for further information on the child sex trade). The trials on the three cases are underway. Prosecutions and convictions for child labor continue to be limited. Since 1995, only four people have been convicted of violating the child labor law. There are nine pending child labor legal cases in Metro Manila, but there were no convictions in 2006. (Note: According to DOLE's Bureau of Women and Young Workers, this data may be incomplete due to a lack of statistics from the provinces. End Note)

Child Prostitution: Little Progress

¶15. Child prostitution -- one of the six WFCL -- is a serious problem, driven by the Philippines' popularity as a destination for sex tourists as well as economic and demographic conditions. UNICEF and local NGOs estimate that 60,000 to 100,000 children work in the commercial sex industry. Most of these children are girls, and they come from very poor families with unemployed or irregularly employed parents. Girls aged 7 to 16 years old are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. There were no convictions under the 2003 anti-trafficking law during the past year. DSWD estimates that the annual increase in prostituted children averages approximately 3,200.

¶16. DSWD provides basic social services such as counseling, medical services, temporary shelter and repatriation for minors rescued from prostitution. NGOs such as the Virilanie Foundation, End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT), and the People's Recovery, Empowerment, and Development Assistance (PREDA) Foundation Inc. complement government and ILO-IPEC efforts by offering counseling services, training, housing, and provision of formal and non-formal education to rescued child sex workers. (See Post's annual Trafficking in Persons Report -- ref c -- for further information on child trafficking.)

Comment

¶17. Overall, the Philippine government is trying to combat child labor, but it remains a serious problem. While RA 9231 strengthened and criminalized many elements of child labor, full implementation of this law faces the same challenges as other social legislation: limited awareness and training in the new law; low numbers of law enforcement and Department of Justice (DOJ) resources; a lack of focus on enforcement; and a lengthy prosecution process. The continuing challenge, as with combating trafficking in persons, is to translate existing laws into increased prosecutions and convictions in order to catch perpetrators and deter future violations of international norms and Philippine law, as well as alleviate the underlying economic and social conditions that perpetuate child labor.

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